

VZCZCXYZ0006
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBUL #1930/01 2011438
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 201438Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0246
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS KABUL 001930

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH SECOND-TIER CANDIDATES

REF: A. KABUL 1747
[1](#)B. KABUL 1899

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On July 15, Ambassador Eikenberry hosted second-tier presidential candidates Sayed Jalal Karim, Ferozan Fana and Dr. Mohammed Nasir Aniss for lunch to publicly demonstrate US active impartiality and to hear their private views on the state of the presidential campaign. The candidates all spoke out against President Karzai and opposition candidate Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, claiming that the two major candidates' dominance in the campaign process biased the race against themselves. Each candidate asserted their own strength in the race and some opined that they would face Karzai in the second round. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) After a media photo opportunity of the Ambassador with the three candidates, which ran that evening and the next day in several outlets, the Ambassador began by emphasizing the U.S. commitment to secure, credible and inclusive elections and stressing the international community's interest in the campaign as a period to permit a debate of ideas, not negotiation of political deals. He noted that the robustness of the debate will impact the public perception of the elections' credibility. The Ambassador stated the U.S. has particular interest in candidates' platforms since we are committed to a long-term partnership with Afghanistan; to work together, we must know the goals we aim to achieve.

Sayed Jalal - Good Ideas, But Local Traction Uncertain

[1](#)3. (SBU) Persian Gulf-based businessman Jalal asserted the international community's substantial investment in Afghanistan should have been used better by Karzai's administration to support democracy. He described a future Afghanistan sufficiently developed to allow the withdrawal of international military forces and the defeat of terrorism. He asserted that terrorism was not indigenous to Afghanistan but imposed on the country by external forces, and reported to have negotiated successfully with second-tier Taliban leaders in some areas to gain their commitment not to act against the elections.

[1](#)4. (U) Jalal reiterated previous themes (ref A) that the government must improve education and public services. He supported a market economy, but felt that Afghanistan would need a transitional system that would provide greater support to the poor. He alluded to, but did not expand on, the need to cut off terrorist funding and advocated utilizing progressive mullahs to connect with the people to enlist support.

[1](#)5. (U) Jalal said he had visited Laghman and Nangarhar where he said that he met between 3,000 and 6,000 supporters; he stated his intention of visiting 10 additional provinces. To promote his campaign, Jalal reported spending five hours each day "out in the street," meeting people, explaining his

ideas, recruiting voters and promoting participation in the elections. He placed himself in the ranks of the "top" candidates with Karzai and Abdullah, based on informal polling his campaign has conducted on an ad-hoc basis.

Fana - Complaints, Not A Platform

¶6. (SBU) Fana, widow of an Aviation Minister assassinated in 2003, complained about Karzai, other candidates, and the difficulties of campaigning. She maintained she had driven to Jalalabad on July 14 to campaign at great personal risk after being denied transportation from the Ministry of Defense. She then reluctantly admitted to having traveled in an armored vehicle provided to her by MOI - loaned by the USG - but quickly returned to allegations of MOI bias against her campaign. She claimed that while weak in media exposure she had a "connection with the people," and that Afghanistan, frankly, needs a woman in charge.

¶7. (SBU) Asked to explain her platform, Fana offered the goals of maintaining security, economic growth and improving education with an emphasis on opportunities for women with no further elaboration. When away from the other candidates, Fana asserted to Ambassador Carney that even with extensive funding, neither Jalal nor Aniss were serious contenders. She claimed that with additional funding, she could win the election due to strong support from her campaign and inquired about possible "international community funding." Ambassador Carney reiterated that the United States neither supports nor opposes any candidate and that direct foreign funding for candidates is illegal under Afghan law.

Aniss - Afghans Are Looking for a Leader

¶8. (U) Pediatrician Dr. Mohammed Nasir Aniss asserted that the Afghan people are dissatisfied with the government's performance and the situation in the country and want a smart, Muslim leader with a national view. He believed Afghanistan suffered from a lack of leadership, and that government officials failed in their role of providing guidance and feedback to the international community. He proposed the need to bring together an educated team of technical experts to create synergy for progress. He broke with previous assertions about his own candidacy - that he was running due to the demand of his supporters (ref B) - and noted that he was engaged in ongoing discussions with other candidates to bring together the best elements of platform and personality. If this could be achieved, Aniss said a number of presidential candidates would drop out of the race and rally behind a single candidate who would represent the unified platform. Reports of the initial meetings of this potential coalition were echoed recently in the local press.

¶9. (U) Aniss promoted the ideas of reconciliation, economic development, strong anti-narcotics policies, increased female participation in government and strategic communication with the Afghan people to rebuild cultural awareness. He supported building small industry, developing Afghanistan's natural resources, and increasing regional trade. He believed the government needed greater connection with the people and better understanding of their needs, but did not propose concrete plans on how to create that connection.

Process Concerns

¶10. (SBU) All three candidates had many complaints about the campaign process. Jalal returned to the theme that the electoral regulations that prohibit candidates from using public buildings - such as mosques and schools - to campaign prevented most candidates from communicating their platforms. The cost of ad time on public media - around USD 600 per minute - was repeatedly raised as prohibitive to candidate

access. Ambassador Carney explained that we have been working with local media outlets, the Electoral Media Commission and UNDP to review additional mechanisms for providing candidates airtime on an equitable basis, and believe many media outlets exist for candidates with small organizations and low funds.

¶11. (SBU) The candidates were concerned about campaign finance spending and irregularities - particularly for Karzai and Abdullah. The three agreed among themselves that given the short time until the election, there was no potential gain from filing complaints with the Electoral Complaints Commission. Awareness is a problem for such overstretched campaigns. Two of the candidates said they were unaware of an ECC briefing for presidential candidates later the same day. Follow up with the ECC confirmed that the candidates' campaigns were notified of the event, but local sources report that Fana's campaign team imploded a few days before the meeting.
EIKENBERRY